

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

White Coat Ceremony Honors Mentors

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

December 18, 2014

When third-year veterinary students received their white coats last weekend at Cornell's White Coat Ceremony in Bailey Hall, much of the focus was on the practitioners, faculty and other veterinarians who had mentored them as well as family members and friends who had come to Ithaca to celebrate the students' rite of passage into the clinical environment.



Proud members of Cornell's Class of 2016 at the White Coat Ceremony on December 6, 2014

(Photo by the author, 2014)

Mentoring is a critical element for veterinary students, often beginning many years before they even enter college, and becoming even more important during their veterinary college experience. The students look for particular personal qualities in a mentor: accessibility, understanding, empathy and honesty; and for someone who has a belief in their ability to succeed. They also look for professional qualities like knowledge and clinical skills, especially in the area of their anticipated professional interests. Inevitably, the best mentors also provide a broad perspective on the profession, based upon an informed and thoughtful understanding of the past as prologue to the future.

Some mentors are family members, such as the relationship that one student, David Seader, has with his father, a 1974 DVM graduate of Cornell.

I was coated by my father, who has been my veterinary mentor since I was a young child. It has been inspiring seeing how he has been an incredible and astute diagnostician over the years. He relishes in sharing whatever knowledge he has and I also have always appreciated how he is an excellent and patient teacher.

David's legacy goes back to an earlier generation, as his grandfather, Dr. Saul Seader, graduated from Cornell during WWII.



David Seader with his parents, Ms. Karen and Dr. Richard Seader '74, who in turn is holding the nametag of David's grandfather, Dr. Saul Seader '45.

(Photo by the author, 2014)

Though one of Rebecca Calder's mentors was unable to attend the ceremony, she spoke of her admiration of Dr. Joe Klopfenstein for his role as a large animal veterinarian in rural Vermont.

Not only is he a trusted veterinarian to his clients, but he is also a respected ambassador of veterinary medicine, tightly woven into his community. He is consulted when there are animal or food safety concerns and jumps at opportunities to teach high school, undergraduate, and veterinary students about veterinary medicine and dairy farming. He is even a trumpet player in the town band. I aspire to be the type of veterinarian who is a competent clinician that shows compassion for my patients and clients, and also someone who is dedicated to his community like Dr. Joe.



*Rebecca Calder and her cat (Autumn)
with her grandmother (Ms. Peg Randall) and her mother (Ms. Ginger Calder).*
(Photo provided by Rebecca Calder)

Ariel Schlag was coated by Dr. Eric Evans who had graduated from Cornell in 1992. Ariel was introduced to Dr. Evans 14 years ago by her third-grade teacher when she had a sick puppy, and she has been learning from him ever since. “He is like a second father to me,” she said.



Ariel Schlag with her mentor, Eric Evans '92 (L) and Dean Michael Kotlikoff.
(Photo by the author, 2014)

In addition to Cornell alumni and faculty, many of the mentors are graduates of other veterinary colleges. A graduate of the University of Georgia, Dr. Teresa Ruth, the owner of Animal Kingdom Veterinary Hospital in Grand Island, New York, coated Rebecca Donnelly. “Dr. Ruth has been my role model and mentor for many years,” Becky said.

When I was about 12 years old, I started taking my countless pets--ferrets, rabbits, cockatiels, hamsters, and more--to her for veterinary care. My idolization grew into a deep respect for the high-quality medicine she practices at the single-doctor hospital she built and owns. I'm incredibly fortunate to have such an inspiring mentor and resource for my future career, and it was especially meaningful to have her symbolically transition me into my clinical career.



Dr. Teresa Ruth, graduate of the University of Georgia (1986), coating Rebecca Donnelly
(Photo by the author, 2014)

Dr. Douglas Wyler, a veterinarian from NY’s Nassau County who received his BS degree from Cornell and veterinary degree from the University of Bologna (1975) testified to the honor of coating Courtney Scanapico.

Being a mentor to a veterinary student is not only an honor and a privilege, but I believe an obligation. Any veterinarian who is passionate about our profession needs to convey that feeling to future generations of veterinarians in any way possible. What more productive manner than mentoring? I'm proud of the young veterinarians I've had the honor to mentor. They have gone on to be professionals whom I am proud to call colleagues. I think that says it all.



Dr. Douglas Wyler coating Courtney Scanapico
(Photo by the author, 2014)

The concept of the White Coat Ceremony was inaugurated in 1993 at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, and then introduced to veterinary medicine by Washington State University a few years later. At Cornell, the Ceremony was introduced in 2004 at the suggestion of the College's Advisory Council under the leadership of Dr. Richard Grambow.

KEYWORDS:

White Coat Ceremony
Rebecca Calder
Ariel Schlag
Eric Evans
David Seader
Richard Seader
Saul Seader
Karen Seader
Rebecca Donnelly
Teresa Ruth
Cornell University
Richard Grambow
Douglas Wyler
Courtney Scanapico

TOPIC:

Mentors

LEADING QUESTION:

What is the White Coat Ceremony in veterinary medicine?

META-SUMMARY:

A description of the 2014 White Coat Ceremony at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.